



Senator Toni Nathaniel Harp, Co-Chair
Representative John C. Geragosian, Co-Chair
Members of the Appropriations Committee

March 11, 2010, Testimony regarding Governor's Budget Mitigation Plan: Nurturing Families

Good Afternoon, my name is Joyce Bosco, and I am the Director of Catholic Charities' Southside Family Center. I am here to discuss the impact of eliminating the Nurturing Families program from community settings.

Catholic Charities operates Nurturing Families programs in three Hartford Family Centers, and elimination would have a detrimental effect on fragile and often young families across the city. Prevention of child abuse MUST be a top priority in Connecticut. Child abuse is a public problem that affects every single Connecticut resident.

The research shows home visits can impart positive benefits to families by way of influencing parenting practices, the quality of the child's home environment, and children's development. Improved parenting skills are associated with improved child well-being and corresponding decreases in maltreatment over time. Research shows that home visiting programs such as Nurturing Families may have their greatest benefits for the most vulnerable families: those often headed by low-income, first-time adolescent mothers

The Nurturing Families Parenting services are foundational to many new parents. There are many factors that affect this. It could be that they were never nurtured; they have difficulty in dealing with conflict, or the stresses of living in poverty and/or crime-ridden neighborhoods negatively impact their ability to parent positively. Nurturing Families helps parents internalize practices of positive parenting to counteract these negative influences. The overall effect is family stability, which of course translates into healthier thriving communities.

It is important that the Nurturing Families Programs remain community based. These centers are imbedded in the community and have an ongoing relationship with the parents in the community. There is a level of trust that has been established that breaks down the barriers to providing services to our client base. Larger institutions struggle with this relational connection that is critical to the success of this work. In addition, they meet people in their own communities and provide a variety of other necessary support services including childcare, adult education, basic human needs services and other services. Therefore, community-based programs reduce the reliance on costly child protective services.

The data is clear: substantiated child abuse claims in Connecticut have decreased dramatically due in large part to programs that include Nurturing Families. Nurturing Families is not only dramatically reducing instances of child abuse, but it is doing so in a cost-effective manner. Because of preventative programs such as Nurturing Families, a future is imaginable where rates of child abuse remain significantly lower than they were at their peak before programs such as Nurturing Families.

Without this program, families would not have needed services that enable them to remain together while other, more costly interventions would be used and/or possibly abused. At Catholic Charities alone over 200 families would be impacted.

Nurturing Families is essential to preventing violence and broken families, which is a critical element for healthy and striving communities. We all realize the importance of a balanced budget. But cutting programs like this begs the question "What is the true cost of not getting positive parenting at critical points in your life when you need it?" We encourage you to continue full funding for these types of preventive and proactive services and continue to protect our most vulnerable citizen pre-natal and newborn babies.

Thank you for your time and consideration.